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KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS:
REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

Museo di Antropologia ed Etnografia

Sistema Museale di Ateneo dell'Università di Torino (MAET)

Corso Massimo d'Azeglio 52, 10126 Turin

Form compiled by Erika Grasso and Gianluigi Mangiapane (curator)

Introduction

The American collection of the MAET comprises around 550 ethnographic and archaeological items, divided into two main sections according to their area of origin: the North American collection (just under 100 ethnographic artefacts and animal remains and around 150 archaeological items) and the Latin American collection (around 300 ethnographic and archaeological items). Part of these two corpora has recently been studied and inventoried by Margherita Valentini, which has made it possible at least in part to clarify the processes through which the objects were gathered and acquired. They consist of small groups of objects donated to the Museum from 1926 (the year the Museum was founded) through to the 1980s by travellers, researchers and missionaries.

Part of the North American section was donated by the family of the physician Paolo De Vecchi after his death (in 1931) and bears witness to a long cruise he made in 1900 along the north-west coast of the United States. A second part consists of several examples of protohistoric lithic industry collected along the Potomac River (USA) by the anthropologist Elmer Reynolds between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. How these items came to the Museum is still under investigation.

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The Latin American section is larger and consists of a heterogeneous body of material originating from different contexts and geographical areas of Central and South America. In this case, the acquisition processes are still only partly understood and involve as main actors Catholic missionaries and researchers active in South America from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. From the 1980s onwards, further donations arrived at the Museum from members of the association “Museo di Antropologia ed Etnografia Amici del Museo”, founded in 1971 and dissolved in 2020.

Also worthy of mention are the two most valuable objects kept at the MAET, namely the two Antillean cemí: one in wood dating to the twelfth century and one in cotton dating to the fifteenth century (the only known pre-Columbian example in the world), both found at the end of the nineteenth century in a cave in the Dominican Republic and linked to the ancestor cult of the Taíno people.

Finally, these corpora are supplemented by two human remains, the result of two donations made at different moments in the Museum’s history: a naturally mummified whole body (Peru–Chile) and a mummified head (of unknown origin).

Cultural Areas (tags)

Subarctic; Northwest Coast; Eastern Woodlands; California; Southwest; Mesoamerica; Caribbean; Central and Southern Andes; Central-Eastern and Coastal Brazil; Gran Chaco

Collections

#01

<i>Name of the collection</i>	North American ethnographic collection “Paolo De Vecchi”
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<i>Collector</i>	Paolo De Vecchi (Asti 1847 – New York 1931)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Subarctic; Northwest Coast; California; Southwest
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Coast-Salish, Tlingit Pomo, Akimel O’Odham
<i>Description of the collection</i>	Around eighty everyday objects (baskets in plant fibre, fishhooks, footwear, travel mementos) coming from northern California, southern Arizona and southern Alaska and documenting the material culture of different cultural contexts (Pomo, Akimel O’Odham, Coast-Salish, Tlingit). This group, recently studied and inventoried, can be traced back to the physician from Asti Paolo De Vecchi who, after moving to the United States, undertook in 1900 a long cruise along the north-west coast during which he collected various “souvenirs” that later entered the holdings of the MAET.
<i>History of the collection</i>	The collection was assembled around 1900 and entered the Museum in 1931.
<i>Online database</i>	Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali:
<i>Web page</i>	https://www.museoantropologia.unito.it/museo/collezioni/collezioni-etnografiche/
<i>Bibliography</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fumagalli, S. 1958. “Emblemi zoomorfi mitici dei

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	nativi dell'Alaska. Nota etnologica e antropogeografica.” <i>L'archivio per l'antropologia e la etnografia</i> LXXXVIII: 273-307.
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#02

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Mesoamerican archaeological collection “Taibel Alulah”
<i>Collector</i>	Taibel Alulah (1892–1984)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Mesoamerica
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Maya (Mexico, Guatemala – Petén site)
<i>Description of the collection</i>	A collection of around forty archaeological objects gathered in the border regions between Mexico and Guatemala by Taibel Alulah (1892–1984), an army major, professor of animal husbandry at the University of Bologna and consultant to the zoological gardens of Turin. They are mostly small ceramic figurines. Taibel donated this collection to the MAET in the 1960s.
<i>History of the collection</i>	The collection was assembled in the mid-twentieth century and reached the Museum between the 1960s and 1970s.
<i>Online database</i>	Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali:

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Web page	https://www.museoantropologia.unito.it/museo/collezioni/collezioni-etnografiche/
Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taibel, A. 1955. “Gli uccelli del Guatemala con speciale riguardo alla regione del Petèn raccolti dal maggio al settembre 1932, in <i>Atti della società italiana di scienze naturali e del museo civico di storia naturale di Milano</i> XCIV: 16 – 20 • Taibel, A. 1938. Terre cotte zoomorfiche precolumbiane, in <i>Rivista di Scienze Naturali</i> “Natura” XXIX. Milano.

#03

Name of the collection	Bororo ethnographic collection “Don Giovanni Falco”
Collector	Father Giovanni Falco (13 October 1923, New York – 18 December 1996, Mato Grosso, Brazil [he may have died in Cuiabá, where the museum is located, but this is not certain]).
Cultural areas	Central-Eastern and Coastal Brazil
Ethnic group / community / cultural context	Bororo (Mato Grosso, Brazil)
Description of the collection	The group comprises around eighty artefacts of various kinds (bows, arrows, jewellery and body ornaments)

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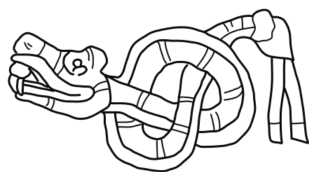
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	associated with the Bororo context and brought to the Museum thanks to a donation by Father Giovanni Falco, a Salesian missionary active in Brazil between the 1920s and 1960s and former director of the Ethnological Museum of Campo Grande (Mato Grosso). The collection consists of sets of bows and arrows, numerous ornaments and body decorations featuring the feathers of Ara ararauna parrots, and several missionary compositions. It represents a collection of craft objects produced in the missionary context in order to document the material culture of the groups involved in evangelisation activities.
<i>History of the collection</i>	The collection was assembled around 1920 and entered the Museum in 1969–1970.
<i>Online database</i>	Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali:
<i>Web page</i>	https://www.museoantropologia.unito.it/museo/collezioni/collezioni-etnografiche/
<i>Bibliography</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Valentini, M. 2024. <i>Il museo de coloniale: un processo contemporaneo. La comunità peruviana torinese e il Museo di Antropologia ed Etnografia dell'Università di Torino</i>. Tesi di Dottorato, Università degli Studi di Torino, Torino.

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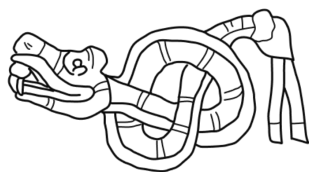
#04

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Aweikoma ethnographic collection “Don Michele Pizzio”
<i>Collector</i>	Father Michele Pizzio (born 14 December 1870 in Casanova, in the province of Carmagnola – died 30 January 1951, probably in the province of Carmagnola, although this is not certain).
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Central-Eastern and Coastal Brazil
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Aweikoma (Santa Catarina, Brazil)
<i>Description of the collection</i>	The collection consists of two fibre baskets, waxed on the inside for carrying water, and seven lithic tools of various shapes and uses.
<i>History of the collection</i>	The collection was assembled between 1899 and 1903 and reached the Museum between 1926 and 1952. It is likely that the Aweikoma collection was donated by Father Michele Pizzio and arrived at the MAET shortly after its foundation. The missionary appears to have travelled between 1899 and 1903 in the state of Santa Catarina (Brazil). In addition to the ethnographic collection, the MAET also preserves a photograph album belonging to the missionary Michele Pizzio.

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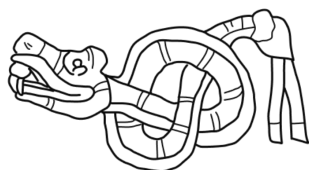
<i>Online database</i>	Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali:
<i>Web page</i>	https://www.museoantropologia.unito.it/museo/collezioni/collezioni-etnografiche/
<i>Bibliography</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articolo de Le Stampa del 1940 • Forno, M. 1966, "Strumenti Litici Aweikoma." <i>Anthropos</i> 61 (3/6): 776-786.

#05

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Gran Chaco ethnographic collection "Alfredo Borelli"
<i>Collector</i>	Alfredo Borelli (Marseille 1858 – Boves 1943)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Gran Chaco
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Argentina
<i>Description of the collection</i>	A group of about fifty everyday objects and body ornaments collected in the Argentine Gran Chaco by Alfredo Borelli during his two journeys (1893 and 1896).
<i>History of the collection</i>	The collection was assembled between 1893 and 1896 and entered the Museum in the 1930s.
<i>Online database</i>	Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali:

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#06

Name of the collection	Miscellaneous ethnographic collection “Amici del Museo”
Collector	Anna Spaltini, Luisa Macaluso, Roberto Pagliero
Cultural areas	Mesoamerica; Central and Southern Andes
Ethnic group / community / cultural context	Mesoamerica: Mexico, Guatemala Central and Southern Andes: Peru
Description of the collection	Collection currently under study.
History of the collection	Objects collected in the second half of the twentieth century by private collectors and travellers associated with the association “Museo di Antropologia ed

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	Etnografia Amici del Museo” and donated to the MAET between 1980 and 2014.
Online database	Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali:
Web page	https://www.museoantropologia.unito.it/museo/collezioni/collezioni-etnografiche/
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#07

Name of the collection	Táino cemí collection
Collector	Giovan Battista Cambiaso (1820–1886)
Cultural areas	Caribbean (Repubblica Dominicana)
Ethnic group / community / cultural context	Táino
Description of the collection	The collection consists of two cemí, one in wood dating to the eleventh century and one in cotton with human remains inside, dating to the fifteenth century.
History of the collection	Documentation records their purchase in 1882 by Admiral Giovan Battista Cambiaso, a Genoese merchant who became famous for founding the Dominican Navy. In 1903 the American anthropologist Jesse Walter Fewkes

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	<p>travelled to Santo Domingo; in his travel notes he reports visiting the Cambiaso family home to see the cotton cemí, where he was told that it had been sent to relatives in Genoa. In 1928 the two cemí were donated to the then director of the Museo di Antichità di Torino, Ernesto Schiaparelli (Occhieppo Inferiore 1856 – Turin 1928), who passed them on immediately to the MAET.</p>
Online database	Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali:
Web page	<p>https://www.museoantropologia.unito.it/lo-zemi-di-cotone-del-museo-di-antropologia-ed-etnografia-delluniversita-di-torino/</p> <p>https://www.catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/DemoEthnoAnthropologicalHeritage/0100441522</p>
Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ostapkowicz J. et al. 2012. Chronologies in wood and resin: AMS ¹⁴C dating of pre-Hispanic Caribbean wood sculpture, <i>JAS</i>, 39 (7). • Ostapkowicz J., L. Newsom. 2012. “Gods... Adorned with the Embroiderer’s needle’: the materials, making and meaning of a Taino cotton reliquary.” <i>Latin American Antiquity</i> 23 (3): 300-326. • Ostapkowicz J., C. Pennacini. 2023. “Collecting ‘Remembrances of these Isles’: Tracing the Post-1880 History of a Taíno Cotton Cemí in the

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	Dominican Republic and Italy.” <i>Latin American Antiquity</i> : 1-17.
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#08

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Anthropological collection “Latin America”
<i>Collector</i>	Emanuele Franco and unknown donor
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Central and Southern Andes
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Peru, Chile
<i>Description of the collection</i>	The collection consists of: 1) a naturally mummified female body from southern Peru/northern Chile, on which various analyses (including dating) are currently under way. The specimen was collected by a traveller from Turin in South America in the 1920s (known as “Emanuele Franco”, about whom nothing further is known) and personally donated by him to Giovanni Marro between 1926 and 1931; 2) a mummified head about which no information is available (it was probably brought to the Museum between the 1970s and 1980s).
<i>History of the collection</i>	Part of the collection was gathered in the 1920s and reached the Museum in the 1930s. For the remaining part, no information is available.

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Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marro, G. 1936, <i>Il primo decennio della fondazione dell'Istituto e Museo di Antropologia ed Etnografia</i>, Torino, S.E.T.

#09

Name of the collection	Lithic industry collection “Elmer Reynolds”
Collector	Elmer R. Reynolds (1846–1907)
Cultural areas	Eastern Woodlands
Ethnic group / community / cultural context	Potomac River valley
Description of the collection	The collection consists of more than 200 examples of protohistoric lithic industry that have not yet been studied.
History of the collection	The collection was assembled between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the period when it was acquired by the Museum is unknown. In Italy the archaeological collections gathered by Reynolds arrived shortly before 1887, but the process by which

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	they were acquired by the Museo di Antropologia ed Etnografia di Torino is not known.
Online database	Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali:
Web page	https://www.museoantropologia.unito.it/museo/collezioni/collezioni-etnografiche/
Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reynolds, R.E. 1883. <i>Avanzi preistorici nelle vallate del Potomac e dello Shenandoah meridionale</i>. Ravenna: Tip. Calderini.

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